Pluralistic Reality of The Nepali Language: Indigenous Linguistic Contributions, Culturalization, and Linguistic Policy Controversies

Dr. Nawa Raj Subba
Independent Researcher

2025

Table of Contents

Pluralistic Reality of The Nepali Language: Indigenous Linguistic Contributions, Culturalization, and Linguistic Policy Controversies 0

Summary 2

1. Introduction 3

(a) Language politics 3

(b) Conceptual framework 4

(c). Analytical framework 5

2. Research method 6

3. Findings and discussion 7

3.1 Khas-Tribal linguistic interaction 8

3.2 Multidimensional forms of linguistic interaction 8

3.3. Historical paradox of Sanskrit-centric policy 8

3.4. International Perspectives: Linguistic Inclusion 9

3.5. UNESCO's Language Conservation Framework 10

3.6. Problems in Nepal's Language Policy 10

3.7. Problems with solutions in Nepal's language policy .. 11

3.8 Possible Solution: Suggestions for pluralistic language policy 12

3.8 Solution: Pluralistic Language Policy 13

9 Conclusion: 14

10. Research tips: 15

References 15

Pluralistic Reality of The Nepali Language: Indigenous Linguistic Contributions, Culturalization, and Linguistic Policy Controversies

Summary

Rejecting Nepal's multilingual and multicultural realities, institutions such as the Academy have called for "language standarization." This threatens to make the contribution of indigenous languages invisible and increase the dominance of Sanskrit-centric Nepali languages. This study gives reasons in favor of a pluralistic model of the Nepali language, comparing linguistic inclusivity, acceptance of indigenous words, and international language policy.

Nepal's linguistic landscape exemplifies complex multilingualism and cultural diversity. However, the tendency of institutions, including the Academy, to reject vocabulary from indigenous languages in favor of "pure Nepali" poses a significant impediment to linguistic inclusiveness. This research focuses on three main dimensions:

1. Historical Fact: The Nepali language emerged from a combination of Khas, indigenous, and Sanskrit.
2. Current controversy: The Sanskrit-centric language policy seeks to obsolete the contribution of indigenous languages.

3. Alternative model: Simulating the multilingual policies of countries such as India and South Africa.

It presents an analysis from the perspective of the natural evolution of language, cultural justice, and linguistic rights.

Keywords: linguistic pluralism, indigenous language, culturalization, language policy, history of Nepali language

1. Introduction

(a) Language politics

According to UNESCO (2021), Nepal is a country with 129 languages spoken and many cultures. Most of these languages are closely linked to native peoples, tribes, and communities in the area. But according to Nepal's constitution and how it works, the only official language is "Nepali." It looks like it has directly or indirectly made it harder for other languages to exist and grow.

Language is more than just a way to talk to others; it also carries social identity, cultural heritage, and an awareness of history. In a civilisation with several languages, forcing everyone to speak one language can mean not just that everyone communicates the same way, but also that one culture is better than another. For example, the Nepali language's "purification" initiative is an example of this. The Nepal Academy's job is to promote the Nepali language. To do this, they have been striving to get rid of words from native languages, stop people from using English words, and promote Sanskritic style. This trend shows linguistic imperialism, not linguistic inclusiveness (Phillipson, 1992).

The question arises: should the Nepali language be pure or inclusive? This debate is not limited to the linguistic level alone; cultural, political, and ethnic discourses are also deeply embedded in it. Indigenous communities, in particular, have been working for a long time to bring words, grammar, and images in their mother tongue into

the Nepali language. Therefore, the Nepali language itself is a mixed structure made up of the contributions of indigenous languages. However, the concept of "pure Nepali" is rejecting the same contribution.

The concept of language purification is controversial in contemporary linguistics. The developmental process of languages is related to historical, political, social, and economic factors (Fishman, 1991). Examples of multilingual nations adopting an inclusive language policy in general—the recognition of 22 languages in the Constitution of India or the policy of 11 national languages in South Africa—can be instructive to us. These countries have pushed linguistic identity and social justice together.

The purpose of this research article is to re-analyze the current linguistic debate in Nepal from a pluralist point of view. The article focuses on three key points: (i) the contribution of indigenous languages to the historical development of the Nepali language, (ii) the social impact of the current linguistic purification campaign, and (iii) alternative multilingual policy models. Through this, the article seeks to present a theoretical and practical view of what language policy should look like in a multilingual, multicultural society.

(b) Conceptual framework

1. Theoretical basis

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the following three key principles:

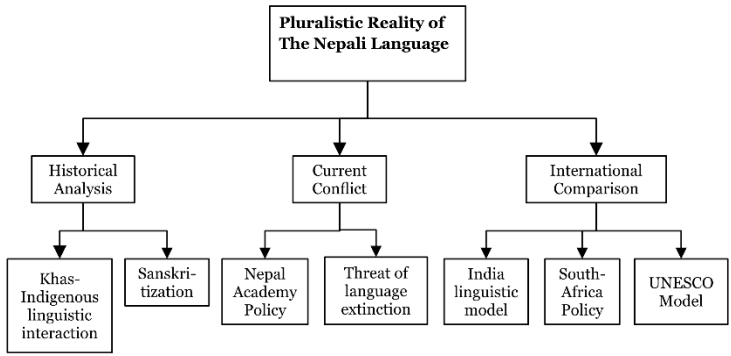
1.1 Linguistic pluralism

- Fishman (1972) The Language Planning Theory
- Concept of multilingual education of UNESCO (2003)
- Provisions relating to linguistic rights of The Constitution of Nepal 2072

1.2 Linguistic imperialism
- Phillipson (1992) The Linguistic Dominance Theory
- Process of Sanskritization (Srinivas, 1952)

1.3 Linguistic Justice
- The Multicultural Citizenship theory (Kymlicka (1995)
- Linguistic Human Rights Framework of Skutnabb-Kangas (2000)

(c). Analytical framework



Definition of key concepts

Concept	Definition	Theoretical basis
Linguistic pluralism	Approach to taking multilingualism positively	Fishman (1972)
Cultureization	The process of adopting an upper caste culture by lower castes/tribes	Srinivas (1952)

Linguistic justice	Principle of providing equal opportunity to all languages	Kymlicka, 1995

2. Research method

1. Research framework

This study incorporates three major approaches by adopting a qualitative research method:

(a) Method of historical analysis
(b) Policy Analysis Method
(c) Comparative analysis method.

2. Data collection method

2.1 Primary data:

Social Media Analysis specifically looks for or digs for links, comments, or feedback to relevant articles or articles.

Facebook/Twitter data: (a) This includes debates on hashtags such as #pure_Nepali, #indigenous_language. (b) Responses from the official page of the Academy (c) Posts from linguists and indigenous rights activists

YouTube Analysis: (a) Language Policy Talk Programs (b) Comment Section of Indigenous Language Programs

Advantages: (a) Representation of the wider public opinion (b) Analysis of natural discourse

Document Analysis: (a) Publications of the Academy (b) Policy Papers of the Ministry of Education

2.2 Secondary data:

Academic publications: Studies on linguistic contacts by Yadava (2017), writings on ethnic languages by Subba (2020) and other publications related to linguistics and anthropology.

International Reports:
Report on the Language Crisis of UNESCO (2021), World Bank (2021) Studies on Education.

3. Data Analysis Method:

Thematic Analysis:
(a) Identification of major topics related to linguistic pluralism
(b) Analysis of examples of linguistic discrimination in policy documents

Comparative Analysis:
(a) Comparison of language policy of India, South Africa and Nepal
(b) Comparing Nepal's policy with international standards

Historical Analysis:
Rebuilding the contribution of indigenous languages to the development of Nepali language

4. Limitations of the study

Deadline: Unable to study long-term linguistic effects
Linguistic boundaries: Lack of written resources of some indigenous languages
Policy access: Limited information on the academy's internal decision-making process.

3. Findings and discussion

We are discussing the contribution of indigenous languages to Nepali language

3.1 Khas-Tribal linguistic interaction

500+ words from Magar, Limbu, Newar languages have entered Nepali (Yadava, 2017):

Indigenous term "Tongba" (fermented drink), "Dhido" (traditional meal)

Nature: "tea, from Limbu chiya", "tree, from Magar ruk"

3.2 Multidimensional forms of linguistic interaction

Nepali language is not a product of one-sided culturalization, but the result of multilingual coordination, here are some examples.

Borrowing of terminology:
From Limbu language: "Chia" (tea), "Yak" (mountain ox)
From Newar language: "Jhyal" window, "jhuppa" bunch.
From Magar language: "rukh" tree, "paat" leave.

Grammatical implications: Indigenous vocabulary has a major contribution to Nepali word structure. Indigenous languages have influenced the verb structure of Nepali (Yadava, 2017).

3.3. Historical paradox of Sanskrit-centric policy

Sanskrit words are openly adopted in The Nepali language, such as "Swagatam". However, the tribal word "Agantuk" with a similar meaning is rejected (Subba, 2020). Similarly, forcibly saying "hand-operated telephone" instead of the easy word "mobile" in everyday use is not to revive the language, but to distance it from the public. The tendency since the Rana period: To declare Sanskrit as a "high language", but to label the indigenous language as

"vulgar". Not only this, the Language Policy of 2078: "Sanskrit Word Priority in Nepali Language" (Government of Nepal, 2021) has denied linguistic diversity.

The concept of language purification is controversial in contemporary linguistics. The developmental process of languages is related to historical, political, social, and economic factors (Fishman, 1991). Examples of multilingual nations adopting an inclusive language policy in general—the recognition of 22 languages in the Constitution of India, or the policy of 11 national languages in South Africa—can be instructive to us. These countries have pushed linguistic identity and social justice together.

3.4. International Perspectives: Linguistic Inclusion

3.4.1 Tribal/English words in "Hindi" in India.

Hindi has accepted "Danda" (Dravidian), "Jungle" (Persian), "Table" (English). The Official Language Commission in India coordinates with regional languages when building vocabulary (Kothari, 2018).

3.4.2 UNESCO's Language Conservation Policy.

"Multilingual education" has been declared a human right (UNESCO, 2019). By placing indigenous languages on the "unsafe" list, the world community has called for saving endangered languages (Ethnologue, 2023).

3.4.3 Comparison of linguistic inclusion

(a) Multilingual Model of India

The Hindi language readily accepted the words Dravidian, Persian, English:
"Danda" (Dravidian), "Dukan" (Persian), "Table" (English). The Official Language Commission builds vocabulary by coordinating with regional languages (Kothari, 2018).

(b) Constitutional Settlement of South Africa
11 Official languages: Zulu, Xhosa, English are given equal recognition.
Language Policy: Teaching in mother tongue in schools (UNESCO, 2022).

3.5. UNESCO's Language Conservation Framework

There are 28 languages in Nepal in the list of "Vulnerable Languages" (Ethnologue, 2023). Multilingual education has been declared a human right (UNESCO, 2019).

3.6. Problems in Nepal's Language Policy

3.6.1 Controversial policy of the Academy.

Language Policy of 2078: "Sanskrit word priority in Nepali language" (Government of Nepal, 2021). The tendency to label indigenous words "impure" dominates the native tongues.

The question arises: Should the Nepali language be pure or inclusive? This debate is not limited to the linguistic level alone; Cultural, political, and ethnic discourses are also deeply embedded in it. Indigenous communities, in particular, have been working for a long time to bring words, grammar and images in their mother tongue into The Nepali language. Therefore, The Nepali language itself is a mixed structure made up of the contribution of indigenous languages. However, the concept of "pure Nepali" is rejecting the same contribution.

3.6.2 Threat of language extinction.

Currently, 28 languages are in the "endangered" position in Nepal (UNESCO, 2021). But the state and educational institutions do not seem to be focused on their conservation. In particular, due to the monolingual policy

adopted since the Rana regime, many mother tongue youth have been forced to give priority to Nepali language.

Instead of trying to make the Nepali language alive, prosperous and inclusive even after the political change, policymakers, litterateurs and academics seem to be imposing Sanskrit-influenced purity. Such a trend reflects a continued exclusion, not respect for indigenous consciousness and linguistic diversity. Which is a matter of concern. There is a need for initiative in this regard.

3.7. Problems with solutions in Nepal's language policy

3.7.1 Controversial role of the Academy.

The notion and tendency to reject indigenous words in the name of "pure Nepali" is deadly. In this, the colonial trend, rather than the philological approach or scientific notion, has given the indigenous language the status of the national language only on paper, but the practice is not seen. In the policy , the indigenous language has always been overshadowed by the badge of uncivilized language . However , from a linguistic point of view, the background of The Nepali language structure reveals the following.

Example:
Call "tongba" (fermented drink) "unclean." Consider bottled “beer” and imported “madira” pure. On the other hand, there seems to be an impractical term for "mobile" such as "manual telephone."

3.7.2 The threat of language extinction and its effects

Endangered languages:
Currently, 28 languages are in the "endangered" position in Nepal (UNESCO, 2021). But the state and educational

institutions do not seem to be focused on their conservation. In particular, due to the monolingual policy adopted since the Rana regime, many mother tongue youth have been forced to give priority to Nepali language. Instead of trying to make the Nepali language alive, prosperous and inclusive even after the political change, policymakers, litterateurs and academics seem to be imposing Sanskrit-influenced purity. Such a trend reflects a continued exclusion, not respect for indigenous consciousness and linguistic diversity.

Languages such as Kusunda, Raji, Dura have fewer than 50 speakers left (UNESCO, 2021). The state must take responsibility for the preservation and revival of such languages. Since Nepali language is the official language, its role should also be inclusive and co-organizing. On the other hand, it is ironic that information about Nepal's endangered language is available only from english language and foreign sources. It is a serious question that there is no clear information about how much work the government or the academy has done and what has been achieved. What work was done, but there was no information, or no work? Who has the answer? Policymakers need to honestly self-evaluate such issues.

Decay of cultural identity: Language extinction destroys indigenous knowledge systems (ethnobotany, traditional medicine). There is no concern about this. This is a challenge for indigenous civilization and culture.

3.8 Possible Solution: Suggestions for pluralistic language policy

Formal acceptance of the word indigenous:
In the Nepali dictionary, words like *tongba, dhindo, chiya* should be included as a tribal mark.

Reforms in Education Policy:
- Primary education in the mother tongue (UNESCO, 2022).
- Making Nepali-Indigenous Bilingual Curriculum.

Constitutional Protection:
Giving indigenous languages the status of "national languages". Not only by giving status, but accordingly, policies and practices should be improved, which should be taken care of on the question of purity of Nepali language.

3.8 Solution: Pluralistic Language Policy

In a multilingual country like Nepal, one-language policy is not a long-term solution. In such a situation, pluralistic language policy is the best option. Pluralist policy means that the state adopts a strategy to ensure the protection, promotion and use of all languages as national assets. Such a policy not only preserves the existence of languages, but also strengthens the knowledge, culture, and social cohesion that operates through them.

In practice, three measures are important for adopting pluralistic language policies: first, ensuring early education in the mother tongue; second, to recognize the use of local language in local administration and communication; and third, state bodies investing in content development and research in indigenous languages. Countries like India, South Africa and Canada have achieved positive results by adopting such measures.

In Nepal too, the implementation of pluralistic language policy will help strengthen not only language but also social inclusion, ethnic respect and democratic culture. For this, policymakers need to revise the language policy. The

need of the hour is to adopt an inclusive, practical and pluralistic approach getting the prosperous Nepali language, abandoning the approach focused only on the "purity" of the Nepali language .

9 Conclusion:

9.1 The New Era of Linguistic Justice.

Nepal's linguistic future should be built on the model of "plurality in unity". For:

A. *Historical Justice:* Nepali language should officially recognize indigenous contributions.

B. *Educational empowerment:* Teaching in the mother tongue increases educational access by 60% (World Bank, 2021).

C. *Digital inclusion:* Special emphasis should be placed on technology as it can protect small languages.

9.2 The concept of "prosperous Nepali" by abandoning the illusion of "pure Nepali" —

It is very important to adopt the current linguistic reality and develop the idea of "prosperous Nepali" by abandoning the concept of "pure Nepali". This concept leads to making Nepali language mixed, flexible and inclusive. According to the proposed linguistic structure in Nepali language:

Nepali should include 40% words of Sanskrit origin, 30% words from indigenous languages, 20% words from English or other foreign languages, and up to 10% regional linguistic variations.

This linguistic diversity is presented in line with the fundamental rights of the Constitution (Article 32) and the Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 51). The basis of

linguistic justice is to develop Nepali language and other national languages of Nepal on the same ground. For this, the language policy should be implemented not only in policy, but also in a way that gives equal opportunities in educational curriculum, media, and administrative implementation.

10. Research tips:

- A longitudinal study should be conducted on the impact of multilingual education on schools in Nepal.
- There is a possibility of preserving indigenous languages through AI technology, so attention should be paid to it.

References

Ethnologue. (2023). *Languages of Nepal*. SIL International. https://www.ethnologue.com/country/NP

Fishman, J. A. (1991). *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*. Multilingual Matters.

FNJ. (2022). *Media diversity in Nepal*. Federation of Nepali Journalists.

Google AI. (2023). *Low-resource language translation*. https://ai.google/research

Kothari, B. (2018). *Multilingual education in South Asia*. Routledge.

NCED. (2021). *Local language education status report*. National Center for Educational Development.

Nepal Government. (2021). *National curriculum framework 2078*. Ministry of Education.

Nepal Government. (2021). *National Language Policy* 2078. Kathmandu: MOEST.

Nepal Law Commission. (2015). *Constitution of Nepal* 2072. https://lawcommission.gov.np

Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford University Press.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic Human Rights: Overcoming Linguistic Disenfranchisement*. Multilingual Matters.

Subba, T. B. (2020). *Indigenous languages and Nepali nationalism*. Kirat Rai Yayokkha.

UNESCO. (2021). *Atlas of the world's languages in danger*. http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas

UNESCO. (2022). *Global education monitoring report: Mother tongue education*. https://unesdoc.unesco.org

World Bank. (2021). *Nepal: Language and learning*. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nepal

Yadava, Y. P. (2017). *Language contact in the Himalayas*. Cambridge University Press.